

<https://www.change.org/p/open-letter-free-kashmiri-political-prisoners-end-the-occupation-of-kashmir>

We write this letter in solidarity with the people of Kashmir who have been living under one of the most dense military occupations in the world, where for every 15 Kashmiri civilians there is an armed Indian soldier. We express support for the Kashmiri people's right to self-determination by highlighting and opposing the repression of political dissent in Kashmir through military violence and illegal detentions. We centrally demand the release of all Kashmiri political prisoners – including leaders of the resistance kept under illegal indefinite house arrest and hundreds of children and teenagers detained under brutal conditions – and an end to the state culture of harassment and intimidation through spurious court cases against peaceful political dissenters.

Since 1947, Kashmir has often been framed as a region contested between India and Pakistan. However this framing leaves little consideration for the voices and demands of the Kashmiri people. Since 1990, India, which aggressively controls the most populous region of Kashmir, has deployed close to 700,000 armed forces there. Indian forces have been given protection under laws like Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), which grants them effective immunity from prosecution for human rights abuses, including murder, rape, and torture. While tens of thousands of Kashmiris have been killed in the violent counterinsurgency campaigns, no serious prosecution of Indian military personnel has ever taken place. Kashmiris have consistently called upon international agencies to press for a democratic solution to the Kashmir question, a solution that would allow Kashmiris the primary role in deciding their political future – as also promised in various UN Resolutions.

Since 2008, the movement for Kashmiri self-determination and liberation from the Indian military occupation has overwhelmingly expressed itself via peaceful protests and vigorous mass mobilizations. The Indian government has responded to this renewed struggle through brutal killings, debilitating injuries (including the use of pellet guns and empty tear-gas canisters to blind and maim), and mass detentions of Kashmiris. Under harsh laws like Public Safety Act (PSA), state authorities have imprisoned thousands of Kashmiri youth and activists. Over 5,000 Kashmiris were arrested in the summer of 2008 alone. Since then, more than 15,000 Kashmiris have spent some time in prison at one point or the other. Amnesty International has called PSA a 'lawless law,' under which Kashmiris are arrested through executive orders without charge or trial. Even when some Kashmiri prisoners are released over time, the government keeps most of these cases open specifically for punitive and preëemptive purposes – using them to re-arrest activists, especially before publicly announced civil society demonstrations, and to extract monetary bribes and "espionage work" via threats and torture.

Moreover there are many Kashmiris who have been languishing in Indian jails over several years, some without trial — an overwhelming majority of whom are denied a fair chance to defend themselves in court. The case of Sheikh Farhat and Sheikh Imran, two young Kashmiris, who are lodged in a jail in the West Bengal state of India, is one such case. Both of them have

gone on hunger strikes several times to seek a fresh trial and transfer to a jail in Kashmir. They were arrested in 2003 from Kashmir, and were given life sentences purportedly for having links to the discovery of a truck in West Bengal carrying ammunition, a charge they and their families have denied.

Through this letter we, the undersigned, demand:

1. The release of all Kashmiri political prisoners, especially those who have been arrested without charges or on spurious charges of “sedition” — often simply for expressing political dissent,
2. Fair trials for those who are imprisoned, and are charged or otherwise, for criminal conspiracy against the state,
3. End to the culture of open cases against those Kashmiris who are peacefully expressing their dissent,
4. Revocation of the draconian laws like AFSPA and PSA — rooted in the most repressive phase of the British colonial period — that allow for indefinite detention without charges or trial,
5. Return to their families the last remains of Shaheed Afzal Guru and Shaheed Maqbool Bhat, being kept illegally in the Tihar prison in New Delhi, where they were executed based on politically-motivated judgments and against all norms of justice and fairness, and
6. A sincere and time bound political process that will lead to negotiations with genuine Kashmiri representatives for the future of Kashmir.

References:

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PRESS RELEASE from Free Kashmiri Political Prisoners:

<http://pulsemedia.org/2014/02/03/press-release-from-free-kashmiri-political-prisoners-campaign/>

The full letter and the initial list of signatories are also posted here.

FREE KASHMIRI POLITICAL PRISONERS

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